

REMARKS

This is in response to the Office Action dated April 30, 2008. In view of the foregoing amendments and following representations, reconsideration is respectfully requested.

By the above amendment, claims 1, 13 and 14 are amended; and claims 9-10 and 15-16 are cancelled. Thus, claims 1-8 and 11-14 are currently pending in the present application.

On page 3 of the Office Action, claims 1-7 and 11-14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sugimoto et al. (U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2004/0005149). It is submitted that the present invention, as defined in the amended claims, now clearly distinguishes over the Sugimoto reference for the following reasons.

Sugimoto discloses a substrate treating apparatus that includes a series of substrate transport paths, arranged on upper and lower stories, for transporting substrates. For example, in Fig. 15 of the Sugimoto reference, the treating transport paths 25 on the first story and the treating transport paths 26 on the second story are used as a going-only path for transporting the substrates forward and a return-only path for transporting the substrates in the opposite direction (see abstract, Fig. 15 and paragraphs [380]-[384] of Sugimoto). These two paths are formed in different spaces.

In contrast, in the present invention, the substrate convey apparatus, in the centrally disposed conveyor chamber, conveys substrates between chambers (processing chambers 6-9, preliminary chambers 11-12, load-lock chamber 4, 10). Therefore, convey paths for transporting the substrate forward and return paths for transporting the substrates in the opposite direction are formed in the same place.

In the present invention, when continuously processing a plurality of substrates, processing substrates with return processing can be efficiently carried out by retracting the substrates to a place other than a process chamber (see page 2, line 15 to page 3, line 3 of the specification as originally filed).

In view of the above, it is clear that the construction of the Sugimoto apparatus and that of the present invention are fundamentally different. Furthermore, because the two paths (going-only path and return-only path) in Sugimoto are different, an optimum retraction time cannot be achieved in comparison to the present invention in which the two paths are formed in the same space (conveyor chamber 5). To clearly distinguish the present invention over the Sugimoto reference, independent claims 1 and 13 have been amended to recite that the process chambers are disposed so as to adjoin a periphery of said conveyor chamber, and that the conveyor chamber is centrally disposed relative to said process chambers. Since the treating units and treating transport paths of the Sugimoto processing unit 3 are arranged on the upper and lower stories, the Sugimoto reference does not meet at least the newly added limitations of claims 1 and 13. Furthermore, claims 1 and 13 require that the place to which the substrate is retracted is adapted to accommodate a number of substrates, with the number of substrates being equal to the number of substrates that can be processed at one time by all of said process chambers. This feature does not appear to be disclosed or suggested in Sugimoto.

Further, independent method claim 14 requires the structural arrangement recited in claim 1, and requires a step of re-conveying the substrate after the substrate has been continuously processed by two or more of the processing chambers, wherein the substrate is re-conveyed from the last

processing chamber to any of the two or more processing chambers other than the last processing chamber, and implementing return processing of the substrate; and temporarily retracting the substrate to a place other than a processing chamber during re-conveyance of the substrate, wherein the place to which the substrate is retracted is adapted to accommodate a number of substrates, with the number of substrates being equal to the number of substrates that can be processed at one time by all of said processing chambers. Accordingly, it is submitted that at least the above limitations of independent method claim 14 are not disclosed or suggested by the Sugimoto reference.

Further, on pages 5-6 of the Office Action, Mayden (EP 0272141) is cited by the Examiner to teach a load lock chamber. However, Mayden does not teach the features that are omitted in the Sugimoto reference, and therefore any combination of the Sugimoto and Mayden references would not result in Applicant's invention as defined in independent claims 1, 13 and 14. The remaining claims depend from claim 1, and are therefore allowable at least by virtue of their dependencies.

In view of the above, it is submitted that the present application is now clearly in condition for allowance. The Examiner therefore is requested to pass this case to issue.

In the event that the Examiner has any comments or suggestions of a nature necessary to place this case in condition for allowance, then the Examiner is requested to contact Applicant's undersigned attorney by telephone to promptly resolve any remaining matters.

Respectfully submitted,

Satoshi TAKANO

By: 

Michael S. Huppert
Registration No. 40,268
Attorney for Applicants

MSH/kjf
Washington, D.C. 20006-1021
Telephone (202) 721-8200
Facsimile (202) 721-8250
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